

## Migrant Musicians Try to Define What 'Home' Means to Them

### In the News

*The World's* Marco Werman and Ethiopian-American singer, Meklit Hadero, co-hosted the one-hour Thanksgiving Day special, "Movement," featuring Sudanese, Mexican and Syrian musicians trying to define what "home" means to them, when so much of their lives has been nomadic in nature.

Hadero and her family arrived in Brooklyn, New York, as refugees from her native Ethiopia before her second birthday. She said, all her life she wondered whether there would be a place for her in the country of her birth. "What is home, where is home, these are very human questions," Hadero remarked.

She needn't have worried. In 2011, after developing a musical career fusing Ethiopian jazz and traditional folk with American rhythm, she organized a homecoming show of Ethiopian expatriate musicians back in northern Ethiopia. Before the concert, a thunderstorm developed, interrupting the power supply. Had she come 9,000 miles, only to have everything fall apart?

Then, the audience members turned their cars on and lit up the stage with their headlights, as if to say "You are here, keep going!"

"That night, ... something clicked," she said. She felt a sense of belonging to the people, even though she had lived elsewhere for decades. "Ethiopian music was like our little bread crumbs we would follow to feel our way back home," Hadero explained, a likely reference to the tale of Hansel and Gretel, who dropped bread crumbs as they entered the forest, so that they could follow the bread crumbs home if they got lost.

Sudanese-American musician Ahmed Gallab, who goes by the stage name Sinkane, was born in England, lived in Sudan as a boy, and moved to the United States at the age of 5, when the Sudanese military toppled that nation's government.

Gallab described his life as "very transient," good preparation, he supposed, for life on the road as a musician. He's never lived anywhere for more than four years.

But that nomadic lifestyle was hard on him as a boy. Because of his dark skin and Muslim identity, he didn't fit in the very white, Mormon community of Provo, Utah, but when they moved to, Kent, Ohio, American blacks told him he was weird, that he acted and talked "too white."

It was punk rockers who accepted him, when he was 13. "They said, 'It's okay for you to be who you are, and we accept that.' It really allowed me to understand that people who are exactly like you aren't the only people who can understand your experience and your struggle. You know, the struggle is universal." Those kids, who were in many ways so different from him, became a kind of family and home for him.

In 2017 Sinkane returned to Sudan to share his unique fusion of African roots, funky electronica and Arab jazz in a cultural festival. While there, a village elder advised him, "You came from a nomadic people. You're never going to find your home. Your home will find you."

Mexican singer, Diana Gameros, grew up in Ciudad Juárez, before her hometown became notorious in the mid-2000s for drug cartels, gang violence and femicides. Gameros came to the United States on a tourist visa but wanted to study music. When she wasn't granted a student visa, she stayed under the radar as an undocumented student. Later, she found work in San Francisco, singing Mexican ballads and pop.

Gameros' belief that families should stick together caused her some inner pain, since her career path took her far from her own family for years. But when she finally got her green card in 2018, she was able to return to her hometown, where she sang her signature composition, "En Juárez," for appreciative residents, "about a time when they could still dream."

The final guest on the "Movement" program, music producer Samer Saem Eldahr, fled his native city of Aleppo, Syria, after war broke out in 2011. Also a visual artist, Eldahr uses the pseudonym Hello Psychaleppo when performing a mix of traditional Arabic music and electronica as a way to protest war. After migrating to Lebanon, he migrated to the United States to find a job, and later moved to Turkey when his parents were denied visas to join him in Minnesota.

Will he ever go back home to Syria? He doesn't know. But if that is ever possible, he knows nothing will be the same.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Four Musicians Grapple With the Same Question: What Is Home? \*PRI\*](#)

[A Longing for Home -- Mine and Yours. \*Hindustan Times\*](#)

[Longing for Home, Uncertain to Return. \*Merath\*](#)

[Longing for a Home: Reflections From a Sojourner. \*Mirandarejoice\*](#)

[Jerusalem in My Heart: Longing for Home Through Music. \*Refugee Phrase Book\*](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

Susan Maxwell Booth, former missionary to Hungary, wrote in "[Longing for Home](#)": "The mere mention of the word [home] can evoke a longing so profound that it can only be described in terms of a physical ailment: homesickness. Longings for home punctuate our books, our movies [such as *The Wizard of Oz*, *E.T.*, *Apollo 13*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Martian*, *The Jungle Book*], and

our music: 'There's no place like home'; 'Home is where the heart is'; 'I'll be home for Christmas, if only in my dreams'; 'You can't go home again.'

"Finding the way home is a perennial cry of the human heart," Booth continued. "But ... even if we somehow find our way back to where we came from, it disappoints. It still doesn't satisfy this universal longing for home. There seems to be a deep-seated sense of exile that no home on earth can resolve -- however lovely or filled with laughter.

"Faces that used to gather round the table may be far away, or wrinkled, or ... no longer with us," Booth noted. "As much as we've tried to savor the moments, we are sometimes left with an unsettling nostalgia for the home that was.

"Or wasn't. Even when the word 'home' conjures up associations of dysfunction and brokenness, it uncovers a powerful ache for someplace better."

How does our faith speak to that hunger that resides in the human heart for the elusive home?

### **The Big Questions**

1. What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of home?
2. Where is home for you? How does that place fill that role?
3. When, if ever, have you found the experience of going home to be cathartic or otherwise emotional? What do you think stirred up those emotions?
4. What does knowing that God is your eternal home mean to you?
5. How does the fact that Jesus was himself a displaced, homeless refugee, with no place to lay his head (Matthew 2:13-15; 8:20), impact you?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **Genesis 3:22-24**

*Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" -- therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life. (For context, read 3:17-24.)*

At the dawn of creation, God created a perfect, harmonious earthly home where God, humans and the other inhabitants of the world lived together in peace. But before long, tragedy struck, as Adam and Eve chose their own path rather than the design of their Creator. Having eaten from

the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, they were evicted from the Garden of Eden, lest they eat from the Tree of Life in their rebellion, and live forever in that unhappy condition.

Since then, humans have lived estranged and alienated from God, barred from the home God created for them. As Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O God, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you."

"This longing for home is innate, something God wired in us," wrote author Daniel Darling. "Ever since Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden, we've been displaced, a bit uncomfortable wherever we are. ... In between we are exiles. Strangers in a strange city and strange land (1 Peter 2:11)."

"So those longings for home remind us that the world is not as it should be, that we're a long way from Eden," Darling added. "And yet those same longings are aspirations for the world as it will be, that New Jerusalem descending from Heaven."

In the final chapter of the Bible, John describes a vision of the Holy City, in which the Tree of Life, ever green and ever fruitful, flourishes, providing nourishment and healing for the nations of the world (Revelation 22:1-2). Our faith teaches us that entry into that city and access to that tree is made possible by the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God who was raised to life and promised to come again to take us home to be with God forever (John 14:1-3).

"On that day when Jesus returns," declared [Timothy Harmon](#), Assistant Director of the Th.M. Program at Western Seminary, "it will be a home-coming of epic proportions -- for it will be a day when those who have turned from their rebellion, and have placed their trust in Jesus, will be home not just for the holidays, but home forevermore."

**Questions:** When, if ever, have you experienced the sense of being a sojourner, a stranger in a strange land, exiled from the home where you really belong? To what degree does following Jesus alleviate that sensation? To what degree might that longing persist for those who follow Jesus?

### **Luke 15:18-20, 28**

*[The younger son said to himself,] "I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ... Then [the elder son] became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. (For context, read 15:1-2, 11-32.)*

Luke sets the scene for the rest of Luke 15 in verses 1-2. The religious elites grumble about the fact that Jesus welcomes sinners and eats with them. Jesus has quite a rapt audience of tax collectors and sinners, who came near to listen to him. There is no indication that the scribes and Pharisees are at all interested in what Jesus has to say.

The two sons who wander far from their father's love in verses 11-32 represent these two groups: those who "sin boldly," as Luther put it, and those who disguise their sin under a veneer of surface righteousness. Members of the first group recognize their own distance from their true spiritual home in God more quickly, while members of the second group assume, wrongly, that physical proximity to religious things or people equals righteousness.

The younger son greedily accepts his inheritance from his father and takes off for a distant country, as far from his home as he can get, where he squanders all his father had worked so hard to provide for him. When he has nothing left, a famine hits the entire country, and he realizes that even his father's hired hands are better off than he is. So the boy resolves to return home, if only to work in his father's employ.

Meanwhile, the father, who has been scanning the horizon, watching for the faintest sign of his younger son, catches sight of him while he is still far off, and runs to welcome him home. He showers him with all the pent-up love he has been holding inside during his boy's absence, throwing him a party.

But when his older son hears what's going on, he is filled with resentment and refuses to participate in the welcome-home celebration, much like the scribes and the Pharisees who resent the welcome Jesus extends to tax collectors and sinners. They do not rejoice with Jesus over those who are coming to faith and new life as they listen to his message. They, like the elder son, "refuse to go in" to their Father's house, and so they cannot share in the joy of the homecoming of those who have seen the error of their ways and returned from a far country.

**Questions:** What are some of the things that draw people away from their true home in God? Why might it actually be more difficult for people who are highly religious to draw close to God? What did the younger son discover while he was away from his father that led him to humble himself and return home? What did the elder son still need to learn before he could be reconciled to his father?

### **1 Peter 2:4-6, 9**

*Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture:*

*"See, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious;  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."*

*... But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (For context, read 2:4-11.)*

Peter (whose name means "stone") describes Jesus as the living cornerstone of the spiritual house God is building. God laid Peter and the other apostles upon Jesus, the foundation of God's house

(1 Corinthians 3:11; Ephesians 2:20). Subsequent generations of Christ-followers have been added throughout the centuries.

People rejected Jesus, but God chose him and treasured him, making him the most important stone in the spiritual home God is building, the life upon whom all else is built, without whom that house would fall apart.

The recipients of Peter's letter had also been "rejects," not God's people nor objects of God's mercy (v. 10, a reference to the prophet Hosea's rejection of his unfaithful wife's second and third sons by another man; that story is found in Hosea 1:6-9). But that situation had changed. Peter writes that God chose to include his readers in God's royal family, with the rights, responsibilities and blessings that position entails.

In verse 11, Peter calls the recipients of his letter "Beloved" and "aliens and exiles." The juxtaposition of those terms is jarring. We wouldn't normally connect them. We think of aliens and exiles as those who have not been loved, but who have been restricted or even worse, banished. But Peter tells us that they are not only invited into the house, but they become part and parcel of God's people, taking on a crucial role in the building up of God's house.

**Questions:** What does it mean to you to know that the spiritual house God is building is made up of reclaimed "rejects"?

How do stones in a building "trust" the cornerstone? How does that metaphor translate into how Christ-followers trust Christ our cornerstone?

How are we becoming God's spiritual home for others?

### **Revelation 21:3-4**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,  
"See, the home of God is among mortals.  
He will dwell with them;  
they will be his peoples,  
and God himself will be with them;  
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.  
Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away." (For context, read 21:1-7.)*

Central to John's final vision of the Holy City is the revelation that God will ultimately make his home among mortals.

God had taken up residence with humans before, when Jesus was born of a woman and lived among us (John 1:14).

The Greek word used in both of these passages refers to dwelling in a tent, in an encampment, in a tabernacle or shelter. The term suggests a willingness and readiness to share the vicissitudes of

life with humans, and the ability to adapt to change, to be "God with us," whatever our circumstances or hardships.

**Questions:** What is the significance of the term "tabernacle" to describe how Jesus made his home among humans the first time he came to Earth?

What is the significance of the term in the context of the heavenly home John describes?

How will God's dwelling with God's people in that heavenly home be like and unlike Jesus' dwelling with people during his time on Earth over 2,000 years ago?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. Discuss this, from *Longing for Home: Tracing the Path of God's Story to Find Your True Home*, by Susan Maxwell Booth, professor of evangelism and missions at the Canadian Southern Baptist Seminary and College:

"I've found that highlighting this theme of 'home' is an excellent way to engage seekers in the metanarrative of scripture. I encourage you to reread God's epic story through this lens and invite some friends to join you on the journey. When we share the gospel in terms of home, it may resonate with the truest, deepest yearnings of their hearts. They may finally hear the words that we long for all our lives: ['Welcome home!'](#)"

2. In his book, *The Weight of Glory*, C.S. Lewis wrote: "Apparently, then, our lifelong nostalgia, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside, is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation. And to be at last summoned inside would be both glory and honor beyond all our merits and also the healing of that old ache."

How much can you relate to this feeling of being on the outside of some door, longing to be summoned inside to be reunited with something in the universe from which you feel cut off?

3. Comment on this: Missionary Kids (MKs) on furlough in the U.S.A. are often bemused by Americans who ask: "How does it feel to be home?" For these missionary kids, home was just as likely to be a compound in Africa, a school in India or a village in Central American mountains. They may feel less at home in the United States, even though they may look "American" to other people.

4. Artist Rebekah Cochell writes in *Longing for Home*, "As an Army Chaplain spouse, I can say this longing [for home] is painfully evident in the military life. Military families have no physical home in which we stay long. ... We long for a place to grow and root and thrive ... However, there is this aspect of moving that is adventurous. It offers a fresh start; I think I secretly hope I will find my true 'home' at the next place. ...

"It seems crazy that a longing that is not fulfilled can be the sweetest thing in our life. Yet, I think we all have moments when a pang of longing fills us with such joy that we can hardly breathe. Sometimes it's a night sky. Other times, it's a melody we hear or a painting we view. I have felt it when reading poetry and classic novels.

"C.S. Lewis believed that the reason why this longing is crucial and beautiful is that this longing is really our longing for heaven, our true home. All of us are displaced aliens in a world in which we pass through, and we were really made for another. Sometimes the beauty in this world reflects some facet of God and his Heaven, and that's when we are reminded that there is so much more than this physical realm. And I know that if there is so much beauty in this world, there will be so much more in our forever home."

Do you have this feeling that Lewis described of being a displaced alien in this world? Is it necessary that one have that feeling? Is there anything lacking in one's spirituality if one does not have such a sense that we were made for something beyond this world?

What is so alluring about transitory experiences? Are these experiences fully satisfying? If so, what makes them so? If not, why aren't they fulfilling in the ultimate sense?

5. Which of these quotes best express the way you think of home, and why?

- ZIP codes may change and the familiar may fade, but when we build our lives on the cornerstone of Christ, we're never far from home. - Motivational speaker, Alicia Bruxvoort
- God does not create a longing or a hope without having a fulfilling reality ready for them. But our longing is our pledge, and blessed are the homesick, for they shall come home. - Danish author, Baroness Karen Christenze von Blixen-Finecke (pen name Isak Dinesen)
- Home is ultimately not about a place to live but about the people with whom you are most fully alive. Home is about love, relationship, community, and belonging, and we are all searching for home. - Salvadorian-American iconoclast, futurist and lead pastor of Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, Erwin Raphael McManus
- Home is the center of my being where I can hear the voice that says: 'You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests.' - Dutch Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen
- [Leah Randall](#), who has lived on four continents, wrote that there is a difference between the place with four walls and a roof where we live and the place our hearts long for, where we are together with those we love. Then, "Even if it were a tent," she said, "We'd still call it home."
- What if the home we long for is not a place but a Person? - Author unknown
- The word longing comes from the same root as the word long in the sense of length in either time or space and also the word belong, so that in its full richness to long suggests to yearn for a long time for something that is a long way off and something that we feel we belong to and that belongs to us. ... The home we long for and belong to is finally where Christ is. I believe that home is Christ's kingdom, which exists both within us and among us as we wend our prodigal ways through the world in search of it. - American writer and theologian Frederick Buechner

## Responding to the News

Brainstorm ways you can help people who are unable to go "home" during this trying time. How can you become a home for others? How can you point people to the God who longs to answer the hunger in the human heart for an eternal home they will never have to leave?

**Prayer** Suggested by Psalm 91:1-2; Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 25:4; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 8; 1 Corinthians 2:9; John 14:1-2; Ephesians 3:17; Ephesians 2:21-22; Isaiah 58:7; Matthew 25:40

Most High God, be our shelter from the storm.  
Eternal God, our dwelling place, we trust in you.  
May we always be at home with you  
in the eternal household you have prepared for those who love you.  
And may Christ always find a pleasant home in and among us.  
As you have welcomed us into your family,  
Give us the compassion and courage  
To welcome the homeless poor into our own homes,  
Knowing that as we do it unto the least of these,  
We do it unto our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,  
By whose grace and by whose Spirit at work within and among us  
We pray. Amen.